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Reporters Committee raps Reagan Administration

Says White House policies are causing the most significant media access restrictions on govt. information since WW II

The Washington-based Reporters Committee on Freedom of the Press has compiled a list of 51 executive actions the Reagan Administration has taken since coming into office to restrict access to information and limit press freedom.

The report also states that 25 bills have been submitted to the current session of Congress which will curtail press freedoms.

"The Reagan Administration's policies are causing the most significant media access restrictions on government information since the end of voluntary censorship in World War II," stated Jack Landau, executive director of the committee. "More threats are coming. Public apathy is being read by the Administration and other conservative press critics as approval for new government censorship policies."

The Reporters Committee said the Administration is planning to submit "new restrictive proposals" to Congress such as establishing a "Official Secrets Acts" which would apply to the press; roll back broad sections of the Freedom of Information Act dealing with access to information on law enforcement, organized crime and health and consumer problems; and end free use of government information.

The list of executive actions aimed at restricting press access to government information follows:

EDITORIAL PRIVACY

March 1981

Deputy Secretary of Defense Frank Carlucci announced a rule stating that all persons with access to classified information must submit to lie detector tests if asked when the Administration decides to trace news leaks to the press. Failure to submit will result in adverse employment action.

May 1981

Atty. Gen. William French Smith says he would support legislation to permit newsroom raids in order to trace leaks of national security info. This idea was first put forth by Director Casey at the Central Intelligence Agency. This would revoke recently enacted law which severely limits police raids of newsrooms.

August 1981

New York Daily News reported that the CIA said it would brief reporters going abroad only if reporters would agree to collect information for the intelligence agency.

December 1981

Justice Dept. enacted regulations removing restrictions of Carter Administration: allows infiltration of media, political and academic groups with approval of Attorney General if done in the interest of national security.

March 1983

President Reagan announced that all government employees having access to certain classified information (SCI-Special Compartmentalized Information) must take lie detector tests or face adverse job actions. After adverse publicity, White House agreed to suspend program until the end of 1984.

March 1983

Department of Justice (DOJ) enacted news regulations allowing FBI to investigate, infiltrate and monitor domestic groups, including press, based only on suspicion that such information is necessary to investigate organized crime or terrorist activities.

October 1983

U.S. Marshal in Athens, Ga., posed as news reporter at a meeting of an anti-nuclear group to obtain information about an upcoming public protest.

GOVT. INFORMATION/ACCESS

April 1981

The 1982 budget made drastic cuts in a variety of government reports at a number of agencies. According to the *N.Y. Times*, these cuts seemed to be directed principally at reports involving education, health, urban affairs, labor and agricultural issues.

May 1981

The 1982 budget cut approximately 60% from the archival indexing staff of the National Archives. This mean access to historical information will be delayed for perhaps years because most of this information, including the Nixon tapes, has to be indexed and reviewed prior to release.

January 1982

White House set up new rule that all interviews with "national media" involving national security matters, i.e., foreign affairs and defense, must be approved in advance by the White House. Administration backed down after confrontation with White House press corps.

January 1983

In an effort to protect national security and to avoid embarrassment to the president (such as the "keister" statement), president orders through a James Baker memo that all interviews, except for those with a few officials, be approved in advance by the White House Communications office.